

Fossils In North Dakota

FIND is a newsletter dedicated to helping young readers (in age or spirit) express their love of fossils and paleontology and to help them learn more about the world under their feet. Each issue will be broken up into sections including Feature Fossils, Travel Destinations, Reader Art, Ask Mr. Lizard, and more!

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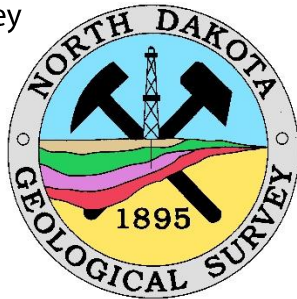
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AMMP Conference

In April, NDGS Paleo staff hosted the annual conference for the Association for Materials and Methods in Paleontology (AMMP). This conference is for fossil preparators to share ideas with one another, such as in the form of a case study or new methodology. This year's symposium topic focused on the development of best practices in the field of fossil preparation.



Above: A group photo of the 2026 AMMP attendees.

All NDGS Paleo staff presented on various topics throughout the conference. Clint ran a workshop discussing mitigation methods for radon in a collections space. Jeff's workshop discussed the pros and cons of using a biostratigraphic approach in our collections. Alex presented at the symposium on chemical hygiene in the fossil preparation lab and also led two workshops. Cathy led two workshops as well, covering how to set up a new lab space and discussing best practices for mechanical preparation. Mindy also presented at the symposium on proper fossil preparation documentation, and she led multiple workshops including how to prepare fossil skin. To say we were busy during the conference is an understatement!

It is tradition for the host of the AMMP conference to provide a special item for the live auction. Inspired by the "major award" in *A Christmas Story*, Mindy spent more than 50 hours putting together a "leg lamp" of a 3D print of Dakota's arm.



Left: The "leg lamp," which was signed by all AMMP attendees. Mindy took extra care to paint every scale by hand!

Mammoth Dig

While June is usually a part of the public fossil dig program, this year NDGS Paleo staff are instead digging in Powers Lake, ND for a mammoth. These mammoth remains are next to and under a garage. Originally found in 1988 when the garage was being built, NDGS staff were unable to retrieve the mammoth within the allotted time. Working with the current landowner, we now have the time to dig this mammoth out!

The concrete floor in the garage was removed in May, and digging efforts kicked off in earnest at the start of June. Because we don't want to leave the homeowner garage-less for a long period of time, we intend to finish this part of the dig by the end of June!

Intern Introductions

Given the time crunch of the mammoth dig, NDGS Paleo was able to hire a few extra interns for the task in addition to our summer field and collections interns. Say hello to Michael, Raesha, Jay, and welcome back to Anna!



Above: Mammoth dig interns working in the garage quarry, from left to right: Michael, Raesha, Jay, and Anna.

Michael

I'm from the Bay Area region, California. I'm a former intern at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Park. I recently graduated from SD Mines with a Master's in paleontology, completing a project investigating fossil preparation training, and is where I volunteered at the Foster Preparation Lab.

Raesha

I've loved paleontology my whole life but wasn't able to get involved in it as an adult until 2018. Since then, I've spent hundreds of hours volunteering at the University of Nebraska State Museum with the vertebrate paleontology team helping prep a variety of mammal fossils, and hundreds more hours at Ashfall Fossil Beds as an intern. My other passions are nature and poetry. I love capturing the beauty of places like the Badlands of South Dakota, the Sandhills of Nebraska, and the wide-open spaces of the Great Plains.

Jay

I'm Jay Christensen. I graduated from Colorado State University in 2024, where I majored in Zoology and minored in Anthropology. Though I loved paleontology as a kid, it didn't become my career plan until I got involved in the Primate Origins Lab at CSU. After graduation, I did a fossil preparation internship at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and then a collections internship at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Colorado. After that, I did a yearlong internship at Pioneer Trails Regional Museum in Bowman, North Dakota. After my time with NDGS, I'll be starting a Master's in Geosciences at East Tennessee State University.

Anna

I am from Atlanta, GA but went to college in Virginia where I discovered my interest in paleontology and spent my summers out in Wyoming digging up sauropods. I graduated in 2024 with a BS in both Geology and Computer Science, and since then, I have been doing various internships. I was a paleo intern for NDGS this past winter, and I am very excited to return to the mammoth site and continue working with the NDGS Paleo team!

Summer Field Intern: Theo Stramecky



Above: Theo sifting at the mammoth dig.

My name is Theo Stramecky. I was born in Urbana, Illinois and moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina when I was 7. I knew by 4 years old that I wanted to do paleontology when I grew up. Around this time, my passion began by going to the Field Museum and the Children's Museum of Indianapolis and looking at the fossils at both museums. And, of course, Sue the *T. rex* caught my eye as a kid. I began collecting any mini plastic excavation kits I could as well as toys and fossils of coral and other invertebrates from the shores of Lake Michigan or Lake Huron during visits to family in Michigan. When I got the chance, I would go to any museum on vacation that I could if it meant it had fossils or dinosaurs of any sort, and that still lasts in my mind even today. I at one point also wanted to dig up my parents' yard to find fossils, but of course that did not really go over well despite my hopes.

Even though I am entering my senior year of college in the fall at East Tennessee State University, I began learning about anything paleontology related way before that point; Walking with Dinosaurs as well as other documentaries were my favorite media to consume as well as any books related to fossils I would devour in short periods of time without stopping. Now as an adult I still watch those older

documentaries and newer ones as well and continue to read any new literature I can get my hands on through university access or that is published, as well as listening to podcasts occasionally. As a kid, every vacation to different places led to me lobbying my parents to visit different museums at different points, some to bigger museums, but I just wanted any sort of fossil interaction I could. My favorite exhibit in the entire world, though, remains to be the Evolving Planet at the Field Museum in Chicago, as it inspired me as well as fascinated me and still fascinates me even today as an adult in college. My favorite time period to look at within the exhibit is still the Permian Period due to the unique fossil material before dinosaurs.



Above: Theo digging at the mammoth dig.

My first true endeavor into proper paleontological work was to volunteer at Gray Fossil Site while I was in high school. However, I truly began more professional work at ETSU working at Gray Fossil Site as a student worker/volunteer. I was able to aid in collection of tapir fossils as well as picking through microvertebrate fossils and preparing fossils in the lab every weekend. This has allowed me to learn and grow as a scientist and paleontologist as well as gain an understanding of how to be a professional rather than just being an enthused kid about paleontology. Last summer I spent time in Montana at Makoshika State Park working as their intern mostly dealing with Hell Creek Formation fossils and doing outreach and tours. I intend to attend graduate school after getting my bachelor's degree, and I am excited to learn and grow here in North Dakota!



Above: Lauren next to an *Apatosaurus* at the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

My name is Lauren Stancik, and I am currently a PhD student at the University of Oklahoma. I grew up in north-central Texas, and I knew I wanted to go into paleontology since elementary school. I always knew I wanted to work with animals, but understanding how animals lived with limited information was fascinating. Watching documentaries like *Prehistoric Predators* and *Prehistoric* encouraged this fascination, and I was hooked. Many hours were spent playing paleontology-themed video games, such as Nintendo's *Fossil Fighters* series. I also dragged my family to every museum I could. My favorite part of the subject continues to be the sheer amount of information we can learn about an animal we will never see in the flesh.

The summer before enrolling in my first undergraduate classes, I began volunteering with my area's local museum. The museum specializes in fossils from the region. I was amazed that so many fossils could be found locally, since these fossils were not discussed in most documentaries I had watched. I fell in love with these fossils and decided to research them in graduate school. While volunteering I also enjoy speaking with visitors and teaching them about the specimens, how they are prepared, and what they can tell us about the animal's life.

One aspect I came to appreciate as an undergraduate student is the problem-solving necessary to determine the best approach for asking paleontological questions. My current research is in

using the morphologies of bones to understand the taxonomy of animals; in other words, I use shape to assign an individual to a species and understand the amount of variation within a species. The group I am working on for my dissertation is an ancestor to mammals, *Dimetrodon*. Despite being found in many dinosaur toy sets, our understanding of individual species of *Dimetrodon* is limited. I use 3D scans of bones to compute their shapes and describe their differences.



Above: Lauren working in the NDGS collections.

Many professional paleontologists have some understanding of field work, preparation methods, and how specimens are stored in collections. One great way for students to gain experience is summer internships, such as those NDGS offers. As a collections intern, I plan to learn best practices in fossil storage and cataloging specimens. With this experience I can become a more well-rounded paleontologist.